



ANTHONY G. BROWN, MARYLAND ATTORNEY GENERAL

CONSUMER ALERT

CONSUMER ALERT: Marylanders Should Be Wary of Deceptive Online Sports Betting Companies and Scams

BALTIMORE, MD (May 19, 2023) – Maryland Attorney General Anthony G. Brown today issued a consumer alert urging Marylanders to always be aware of deceptive online sports betting companies, especially in advance of large-scale popular events like the 2023 Preakness. Companies in Maryland’s online sports betting industry, which also operate through mobile apps, have enticed bettors with aggressive marketing, such as so-called “risk-free” bets. However, these enticements often appear more attractive than they actually are. The fine print may contain limitations that negate the promised benefits. Additionally, it’s not just enticements and complicated “deals” – which may end up costing consumers more money than they were planning to spend in the first place – online gambling is also a target for cybercriminals looking to defraud unsuspecting bettors.

Online sports betting allows consumers to place bets through websites or mobile apps for a variety of sporting events. This type of gambling was launched in Maryland in November 2022, and is available through multiple sport betting companies, or “sportsbooks.” A listing of approved companies can be found here: <https://www.mdgaming.com/maryland-sports-wagering/>.

“Deceptive practices and scams have the potential to overshadow the excitement of sports betting and leave Marylanders vulnerable to financial losses,” said **Attorney General Brown**. “I urge all Marylanders to remain vigilant, conduct thorough research, and exercise caution to avoid financial loss due to misleading tactics. We will protect Maryland residents and their hard-earned money from deception by online sports gaming companies.”

Attorney General Brown offers the following tips to protect consumers from misleading information peddled by sportsbook platforms:

- Learn what other users are saying about the platform: Check consumer reviews and ratings with the Better Business Bureau (www.BBB.org). The BBB complaints are often detailed and include responses from the platforms.
- Read the fine print! Especially on all promotions and bonus money.

- With respect to “risk-free” bets, for example, those funds may only be credited back to the consumer to use again with the sportsbook, not as a refund of the money the consumer initially invested.
- Sportsbooks sometimes require users to gamble their own money before accessing any bonus they advertised.
- Some sportsbooks may restrict the games for which consumers can use promotional money or have additional restrictions that are only listed in the fine print.
- Read all the conditions placed by the sportsbooks that may limit how and when bettors are able to cash out their winnings, or if the sportsbook will penalize bettors – such as freezing accounts –for certain activities and strategies the bettor may use on their platform to increase their chances of winning.
- Remember that there is no such thing as a completely risk-free bet, or free money, when it comes to gambling, despite what may be implied by a sportsbooks ad.

To protect against fraudulent platforms and scammers looking to steal money and financial and personal information, consumers should follow these tips:

- The internet is flooded with fraudulent sports betting websites. Make sure that you are using the official websites of established sportsbooks that have been approved by Maryland’s Lottery and Gaming Control Agency.
- Ignore online gambling pop-up ads and unsolicited emails, text messages, or social media messages. Even if these look like they are coming from a legitimate sportsbook, they could be linking you to a fraudulent website instead.
- Report suspected scams to our Consumer Protection Division at 410-528-8662 or the Federal Bureau of Investigation at <https://tips.fbi.gov/>.

Online sports betting is prevalent and easier to access, now that it is legal in Maryland. Consumers should not forget that they are gambling with real money and that they can suffer devastating financial losses if their gambling becomes problematic. For assistance with problem gambling, Marylanders can visit the Maryland Alliance for Responsible Gambling at <https://www.mdgamblinghelp.org/> or call 1-800-Gambler.

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<https://www.marylandattorneygeneral.gov/press/2023/051923CA.pdf>